

106TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 2447

To amend the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to make competitive grants to establish National Centers for Distance Working to provide assistance to individuals in rural communities to support the use of teleworking in information technology fields.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 13, 2000

Mr. WELLSTONE (for himself, Mr. DASCHLE, and Mr. BAUCUS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

A BILL

To amend the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to make competitive grants to establish National Centers for Distance Working to provide assistance to individuals in rural communities to support the use of teleworking in information technology fields.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Rural Telework Act
5 of 2000”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.**

2 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

3 (1) many rural communities and Indian res-
4 ervations have not benefited from the historic eco-
5 nomic expansion in recent years, and high levels of
6 unemployment and underemployment persist in the
7 rural communities and reservations;

8 (2) many economic opportunities, especially in
9 information technology fields, are located away from
10 many rural communities and reservations;

11 (3) the United States has a significant and
12 growing need for skilled information technology
13 workers;

14 (4) unemployed and underemployed rural em-
15 ployees represent a potential workforce to fill infor-
16 mation technology jobs;

17 (5) teleworking allows rural employees to per-
18 form skill intensive information technology jobs from
19 their communities for firms located outside rural
20 communities; and

21 (6) employing a rural teleworkforce in informa-
22 tion technology fields will require—

23 (A) employers that are willing to hire rural
24 residents or contract for work to be performed
25 in rural communities;

1 (B) recruitment and training of rural resi-
2 dents appropriate for work in information tech-
3 nology fields;

4 (C) means of connecting employers with
5 employees through advanced telecommuni-
6 cations services; and

7 (D) innovative approaches and collabo-
8 rative models to create rural technology busi-
9 ness opportunities and facilitate the employ-
10 ment of rural individuals.

11 (b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are—

12 (1) to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to
13 make competitive grants to establish National Cen-
14 ters for Distance Working in rural areas to provide
15 assistance to individuals in rural communities to
16 support the use of teleworking in information tech-
17 nology fields;

18 (2) to promote teleworking arrangements, small
19 electronic business development, and creation of in-
20 formation technology jobs in rural areas for the pur-
21 pose of creating sustainable economic opportunities
22 in rural communities;

23 (3) to promote the practice of teleworking to in-
24 formation technology jobs among rural, urban, and
25 suburban residents, Indian tribes, job training and

1 workforce development providers, educators, and em-
2 ployers;

3 (4) to meet the needs of information technology
4 and other industries for skilled employees by accel-
5 erating the training and hiring of rural employees to
6 fill existing and future jobs from rural communities
7 and Indian reservations;

8 (5) to promote teleworking and small electronic
9 business as sustainable income sources for rural
10 communities and Indian tribes; and

11 (6) to study, collect information, and develop
12 best practices for rural teleworking employment
13 practices.

14 **SEC. 3. NATIONAL CENTERS FOR DISTANCE WORKING PRO-**
15 **GRAM.**

16 Subtitle D of the Consolidated Farm and Rural De-
17 velopment Act (7 U.S.C. 1981 et seq.) is amended by add-
18 ing at the end the following:

19 **“SEC. 376. NATIONAL CENTERS FOR DISTANCE WORKING**
20 **PROGRAM.**

21 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

22 “(1) CENTER.—The term ‘Center’ means a Na-
23 tional Center for Distance Working established
24 under subsection (b) that receives a grant under this
25 section.

1 “(2) ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATION.—The term ‘eli-
2 gible organization’ means a nonprofit entity, an edu-
3 cational institution, a tribal government, or any
4 other organization that meets the requirements of
5 this section and such other requirements as are es-
6 tablished by the Secretary.

7 “(3) INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY.—The term
8 ‘information technology’ means any equipment, or
9 interconnected system or subsystem of equipment,
10 that is used in the automatic acquisition, storage,
11 manipulation, management, movement, control, dis-
12 play, switching, interchange, transmission, or recep-
13 tion of data or information, including a computer,
14 ancillary equipment, software, firmware and similar
15 procedures, services (including support services), and
16 related resources.

17 “(4) RURAL AREA.—The terms ‘rural’ and
18 ‘rural area’ have the meaning given the terms in sec-
19 tion 381A.

20 “(5) SECRETARY.—The term ‘Secretary’ means
21 the Secretary, acting through the Administrator of
22 the Rural Utility Service.

23 “(6) TELEWORKING.—The term ‘teleworking’
24 means the use of telecommunications to perform
25 work functions over a distance and to reduce or

1 eliminate the need to perform work at a traditional
2 worksite.

3 “(b) ESTABLISHMENT.—

4 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall estab-
5 lish a National Centers for Distance Working Pro-
6 gram under which the Secretary shall make competi-
7 tive grants to eligible organizations to pay the Fed-
8 eral share of the cost of establishing National Cen-
9 ters for Distance Working in rural areas to conduct
10 projects in accordance with subsection (c).

11 “(2) ELIGIBLE ORGANIZATION.—The Secretary
12 shall establish criteria that an organization must
13 meet to be eligible to receive a grant under this sec-
14 tion.

15 “(c) PROJECTS.—A Center shall use a grant received
16 under this section to conduct a 5-year project—

17 “(1) to provide training, referral, assessment,
18 and employment-related services and assistance to
19 individuals in rural communities and Indian tribes to
20 support the use of teleworking in information tech-
21 nology fields, including services and assistance re-
22 lated to high technology training, telecommuni-
23 cations infrastructure, capital equipment, job place-
24 ment services, and other means of promoting tele-
25 working;

1 “(2) to identify skills that are needed by the
2 business community and that will enable trainees to
3 secure employment after the completion of training;

4 “(3) to recruit employers for rural individuals
5 and residents of Indian reservations;

6 “(4) to provide for high-speed communications
7 between the individuals in the targeted rural com-
8 munity or reservation and employers that carry out
9 information technology work that is suitable for tele-
10 working;

11 “(5) to provide for access to or ownership of
12 the facilities, hardware, software, and other equip-
13 ment necessary to perform information technology
14 jobs; and

15 “(6) to perform such other functions as the
16 Secretary considers appropriate.

17 “(d) ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA.—

18 “(1) APPLICATION AND PLAN.—As a condition
19 of receiving a grant under this section for use with
20 respect to a rural area, an organization shall submit
21 to the Secretary, and obtain the approval of the Sec-
22 retary of, an application and 5-year plan for the use
23 of the grant to carry out a project described in sub-
24 section (c), including a description of—

1 “(A) the businesses and employers that
2 will provide employment opportunities in the
3 rural area;

4 “(B) fundraising strategies;

5 “(C) training and training delivery meth-
6 ods to be employed;

7 “(D) the rural community of individuals to
8 be targeted to receive assistance;

9 “(E) any support from State and local gov-
10 ernments and other non-Federal sources; and

11 “(F) outreach activities to be carried out
12 to reach potential information technology em-
13 ployers.

14 “(2) NON-FEDERAL SHARE.—

15 “(A) IN GENERAL.—As a condition of re-
16 ceiving a grant under this section, an organiza-
17 tion shall agree to obtain, after the application
18 of the organization has been approved and no-
19 tice of award has been issued, contributions
20 from non-Federal sources that are equal to—

21 “(i) during each of the first, second,
22 and third years of a project, 1 non-Federal
23 dollar for each 2 Federal dollars provided
24 under the grant; and

1 “(ii) during each of the fourth and
 2 fifth years of the project, 1 non-Federal
 3 dollar for each Federal dollar provided
 4 under the grant.

5 “(B) INDIAN TRIBES.—Notwithstanding
 6 subparagraph (A), an Indian tribe may use
 7 Federal funds made available to the tribe for
 8 self-governance to pay the non-Federal con-
 9 tributions required under subparagraph (A).

10 “(C) FORM.—The non-Federal contribu-
 11 tions required under subparagraph (A) may be
 12 in the form of in-kind contributions, including
 13 office equipment, office space, and services.

14 “(e) SELECTION CRITERIA.—

15 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall—

16 “(A) establish criteria for the selection of
 17 eligible organizations to receive grants under
 18 this section; and

19 “(B) evaluate, rank, and select eligible or-
 20 ganizations on the basis of the selection cri-
 21 teria.

22 “(2) FACTORS.—The selection criteria estab-
 23 lished under paragraph (1) shall include—

24 “(A) the experience of the eligible organi-
 25 zation in conducting programs or ongoing ef-

1 forts designed to improve or upgrade the skills
2 of rural employees or members of Indian tribes;

3 “(B) the ability of the eligible organization
4 to initiate a project within a minimum period of
5 time;

6 “(C) the ability and experience of the eligi-
7 ble organization in providing training to rural
8 individuals who are economically disadvantaged
9 or who face significant barriers to employment;

10 “(D) the ability and experience of the eligi-
11 ble organization in conducting information tech-
12 nology skill training;

13 “(E) the degree to which the eligible orga-
14 nization has entered into partnerships or con-
15 tracts with local, tribal, and State governments,
16 community-based organizations, and prospective
17 employers to provide training, employment, and
18 supportive services;

19 “(F) the ability and experience of the eligi-
20 ble organization in providing job placement for
21 rural employees with employers that are suit-
22 able for teleworking;

23 “(G) the computer and telecommunications
24 equipment that the eligible organization has or

1 expects to possess or use under contract on ini-
2 tiation of the project; and

3 “(H) the means the applicant proposes,
4 such as high-speed Internet access, to allow
5 communication between rural employees and
6 employers.

7 “(3) PUBLICATION.—The Secretary shall—

8 “(A) publish the selection criteria estab-
9 lished under this subsection in the Federal Reg-
10 ister; and

11 “(B) include a description of the selection
12 criteria in any solicitation for applications for
13 grants made by the Secretary.

14 “(f) STUDIES OF TELEWORKING.—

15 “(1) IN GENERAL.—To promote the develop-
16 ment of teleworking in rural areas, the Secretary
17 may make grants to entities to conduct research on
18 economic, operational, social, and policy issues relat-
19 ing to teleworking in rural areas, including the de-
20 velopment of best practices for businesses that em-
21 ploy teleworkers.

22 “(2) LIMITATION.—The Secretary shall use not
23 more than \$1,000,000 of funds made available for a
24 fiscal year under subsection (g) to carry out this
25 subsection.

1 “(g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATION.—There is
2 authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
3 \$11,000,000 for each fiscal year.”.

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